

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
DALLAS DIVISION

LEON WASHINGTON,

Plaintiff,

V.

MID-CONTINENTAL CASUALTY
COMPANY, ET AL.,

Defendant.

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No. 3:16-cv-251-D-BN

**FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE**

This case has been referred to the undersigned United States magistrate judge for initial screening pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and a standing order of reference from United States District Judge Sidney A. Fitzwater. The undersigned issues the following findings of fact, conclusions of law, and recommendation that the Court should dismiss this action without prejudice for lack of subject matter jurisdiction and for Plaintiff Leon Washington's failure to prosecute and obey orders of the Court.

Background

The Court docketed Washington's *pro se* complaint on January 29, 2016. On February 1, 2016, the undersigned issued an order advising Washington that it did not appear that the Court has subject matter jurisdiction over his case and requiring him, by March 2, 2016, to show cause in writing why the Court has subject matter jurisdiction. *See* Dkt. No. 7. It is now more than one month since that deadline and more than two months since Washington filed this action, and he has failed to respond

to the Court's show cause order or otherwise contact the Court.

Legal Standards and Analysis

Subject Matter Jurisdiction

The federal courts' jurisdiction is limited, and federal courts generally may only hear a case if it involves a question of federal law or where diversity of citizenship exists between the parties. *See* 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331, 1332. Because Washington chose to file a lawsuit in federal court, it is his burden to establish federal jurisdiction. And if he fails to do so, this lawsuit must be dismissed. *See, e.g., Smith-Lindley v. Tex., Dep't of Family & Protective Servs.*, No. 3:12-cv-4819-K, 2013 WL 4766850, at *1 (N.D. Tex. Sept. 5, 2013) ("A district court must dismiss a case when the plaintiff fails to establish subject-matter jurisdiction." (citing FED. R. CIV. P. 12(b)(1))); FED. R. CIV. P. 12(h)(3) ("If the court determines at any time that it lacks subject-matter jurisdiction, the court must dismiss the action.").

In diversity cases, each plaintiff's citizenship must be diverse from each defendant's citizenship, and the amount in controversy must exceed \$75,000. *See* 28 U.S.C. §§ 1332(a), (b).

Federal question jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1331 "exists when 'a well-pleaded complaint establishes either that federal law creates the cause of action or that the plaintiff's right to relief necessarily depends on resolution of a substantial question of federal law.'" *Borden v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 589 F.3d 168, 172 (5th Cir. 2009) (quoting *Franchise Tax Bd. v. Constr. Laborers Vacation Trust*, 463 U.S. 1, 27-28 (1983)). "A federal question exists 'if there appears on the face of the complaint some

substantial, disputed question of federal law.” *In re Hot-Hed Inc.*, 477 F.3d 320, 323 (5th Cir. 2007) (quoting *Carpenter v. Wichita Falls Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 44 F.3d 362, 366 (5th Cir. 1995)).

The Court will not assume it has jurisdiction. Rather, “the basis upon which jurisdiction depends must be alleged affirmatively and distinctly and cannot be established argumentatively or by mere inference.” *Getty Oil Corp. v. Ins. Co. of N.A.*, 841 F.2d 1254, 1259 (5th Cir. 1988) (citing *Ill. Cent. Gulf R. Co. v. Pargas, Inc.*, 706 F.2d 633, 636 & n.2 (5th Cir. 1983)).

Washington has not “affirmatively and distinctly” alleged jurisdiction. It appears instead that this action concerns state law claims made by a Texas citizen against other Texas citizens (a corporation and two individuals) regarding an amount of money (\$54,647.39) that is far below the requisite amount in controversy.

Specifically, Washington, who has provided the Court a contact address in Dallas, Texas, has filed this action against Mid-Continental Casualty Company (also identified as having an address in Dallas, Texas) and its employees, Darrell Campbell and Ron Davis (identified respectively as a claims adjuster and a claims adjuster supervisor). *See* Dkt. No. 3 at 1-3. Washington states that he was involved in an automobile accident in Dallas and then treated at Baylor Hospital, in Dallas, *see id.* at 3-7, and claims that Mid-Continental, which Washington alleges is “organized and existing under the laws of the State of Texas,” *id.* at 3, breached a settlement release contract by sending him a check for \$3,000 “and not the agreed upon amount of \$17,647.39,” *id.* at 8. Washington seeks monetary damages of \$14,647.39, the balance

of what he claims to be owed, plus \$40,000.00 in punitive damages. *See id.* at 14.

Washington thus has established neither that federal law creates the asserted cause(s) of action, nor that any right to relief necessarily depends on resolution of a substantial question of federal law, nor that there is complete diversity between the parties, nor that the amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000. Accordingly, the Court should dismiss this action without prejudice for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.

Failure to Prosecute

Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b) allows a court to *sua sponte* dismiss an action “with or without notice to the parties,” *Boudwin v. Graystone Ins. Co., Ltd.*, 756 F.2d 399, 401 (5th Cir. 1985), for failure to prosecute or for failure to comply with the federal rules or any court order. Such authority “flows from the court’s inherent power to control its docket and prevent undue delays in the disposition of pending cases.” *Id.* (citing *Link v. Wabash R.R. Co.*, 370 U.S. 626 (1962)); *see also Rosin v. Thaler*, 450 F. App’x 383, 383-84 (5th Cir. 2011) (per curiam) (“A district court may *sua sponte* dismiss an action for failure to prosecute or failure to obey a court order.” (citing FED. R. CIV. P. 41(b); *McCullough v. Lynaugh*, 835 F.2d 1126, 1127 (5th Cir. 1988))).

A Rule 41(b) dismissal may be with or without prejudice. *See Long v. Simmons*, 77 F.3d 878, 879-80 (5th Cir. 1996). But a dismissal with prejudice is appropriate only if the failure to comply with the court order was the result of purposeful delay or contumacious conduct and the imposition of lesser sanctions would be futile. *Id.* at 880; *see Berry v. CIGNA/RSI-CIGNA*, 975 F.2d 1188, 1191 (5th Cir. 1992). “Several” of the following four factors generally must be present before a district court may dismiss an

action with prejudice based on a litigant's refusal to follow a court order:

(1) "the refusal to comply results from willfulness or bad faith and is accompanied by a clear record of delay or contumacious conduct;" (2) the violation of the [Court's] order must be attributable to the client instead of the attorney, (3) the violating party's misconduct "must substantially prejudice the opposing party;" and (4) a less drastic sanction would not substantially achieve the desired deterrent effect.

Doe v. Am. Airlines, 283 F. App'x 289, 291 (5th Cir. 2008) (per curiam) (quoting *F.D.I.C. v. Conner*, 20 F.3d 1376, 1380 (5th Cir. 1994); other citations omitted); *see also* *Clewis v. Medco Health Solutions, Inc.*, No. 3:12-cv-5208-L, 2014 WL 840026, at *6 (N.D. Tex. Mar. 4, 2014) (distinguishing *Berry* – in which the Fifth Circuit stated, "Generally, where a plaintiff has failed only to comply with a few court orders or rules, we have held that the district court abused its discretion." 975 F.2d at 1191 n.6 (citations omitted) – because "[i]n *Berry*, the plaintiff's conduct was merely negligent, and he had not been warned by the court prior to dismissal," whereas Clewis's conduct was "intentional and willing").

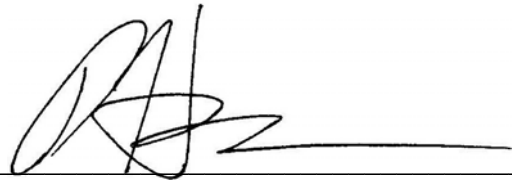
By failing to respond to the Court's show cause order, Washington has prevented this action from proceeding, and, therefore, he has failed to prosecute his lawsuit and obey the Court's order. A Rule 41(b) dismissal of this lawsuit without prejudice is warranted under these circumstances. And the undersigned concludes that lesser sanctions would be futile. The Court is not required to delay the disposition of this case until such time as Washington decides comply with the Court's orders. Accordingly, the Court should exercise its inherent power to prevent undue delays in the disposition of pending case and *sua sponte* dismiss this action without prejudice.

Recommendation

The Court should dismiss this action without prejudice pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(h)(3) and Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b).

A copy of these findings, conclusions, and recommendation shall be served on all parties in the manner provided by law. Any party who objects to any part of these findings, conclusions, and recommendation must file specific written objections within 14 days after being served with a copy. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); FED. R. CIV. P. 72(b). In order to be specific, an objection must identify the specific finding or recommendation to which objection is made, state the basis for the objection, and specify the place in the magistrate judge's findings, conclusions, and recommendation where the disputed determination is found. An objection that merely incorporates by reference or refers to the briefing before the magistrate judge is not specific. Failure to file specific written objections will bar the aggrieved party from appealing the factual findings and legal conclusions of the magistrate judge that are accepted or adopted by the district court, except upon grounds of plain error. *See Douglass v. United Servs. Auto. Ass'n*, 79 F.3d 1415, 1417 (5th Cir. 1996).

DATED: April 12, 2016

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Horan', written over a horizontal line.

DAVID L. HORAN
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE